

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Question # 19.2.5

What Is The Relationship Between the Nation of Israel and the Church?

Part Two and a Half

Romans 11:11-27

May 28, 2017

Communion: Archie Miller

Care Calling: Marilyn Currier

Host: Roger Wagner

Saturday 5/27 Clean Up: Clinton Torpen

- 1 ♪ **How Majestic [DH 2238]**
- 2 ♪ 8 - Come thou almighty king [All] 8
- 3 ♪ 21 - O for a thousand tongues to sing [All] 21
- 4 ♪ **Doxology [DH 1981]**
- 5 ♪ 45 - Crown him with many crowns [All] 45
- 6 ♪ 515 - Since I have been redeemed [v-1] 515
- 7 ♪ **Family of God [DH 2357]**

Romans 11:11-27 (NASB)

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for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13

But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if

somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and

save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the

dead? 16 If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.* 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

I don't know who raised this question, but it's one of the hottest debated topics in the church today.

And to adequately deal with it, I have divided this topic into several sermons.

Your handout for today is the sermon of May 7th.

I hope you take time to study it, especially the fulfilled Scriptures.

Please remember that Israel has a right to be in possession of their

occupied land.

That is not in question, because the land was transferred from British possession to Israeli possession by direction of the UN in 1947, and Israel became a political nation in 1948.

And remember In **132 A.D. Simon bar Kokhba** led a rebellion to drive out the Romans, and after two and a half years was defeated. After the failed rebellion of Simon bar Kokhba that ended in **135 A.D.**, the Roman **Emperor Aelius Hadrian** determined to wipe out the identity of Israel/Judah/Judea.

Judea and Samaria were renamed by Hadrian to **Syria Palaestina**, after the Assyrians and Philistines respectively, both as an insult to the Jews and as a means of erasing the land's Jewish identity.

The Romans engaged in mass executions, expulsions, and enslavement, selling off the majority as slaves, destroying large numbers of Judean towns and forbidding Jews from settling in Jerusalem or its environs.

In addition, Hadrian brought in retired Roman military to settle the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Israel.

Although some Jews maintained their presence in Syria-Palestina, they became a disposed and dispersed people.

At the same time, he changed the name of Jerusalem to **Colonia Aelia Capitolina**.

Aelia is derived from the emperor's family name (Aelius), and *Capitolina* refers to the cult of the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva)

A temple dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva was built on the site of the former Jewish temple, the Temple Mount.

Colonia Aelia Capitolina remained the official name of Jerusalem until **638 AD** when the Arabs conquered the city and kept the first part of it as **Iliyā'**.

So, it was in 135 that the land of Israel-Judah-Judea became known as Palestine.

And up to the time of the Six-Day War in 1967, it was the Jewish

population that was known as "*Palestinians*."

There is nothing about the year 1948, when a new Israeli state was formed, that has any connection to Bible prophecy.

Nothing in the Bible predicts a literal reconstitution of the biblical land promises, a rebuilt temple, reinstatement of temple sacrifices, or any of the Old Covenant worship practices.

I spent a year in graduate school with a Israeli rabbi that maintained the modern nation of Israel is not even a religious state.

Christian America's political support of Israel **should not be** because of fulfillment of prophecy, but because it is a democracy in the midst of tyrannical states.

And, also, please keep in mind that for 1,813 years the Jews as a nation did not have possession of what is now Israel.

And, you do know why they did not, do you not?
God gave the land to Abraham conditionally:

Exodus 19:5-6 (NASB)

5 'Now then, *if* you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

Deuteronomy 31:16-18 (NASB)

16 The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. 17 "Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they

will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?' 18 "But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.

Joshua 23:16 (NASB)

16 "When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."

The land was given conditionally.

And, God sets forth in shocking detail what would transpire if Israel were disobedient.

Deuteronomy 28:15-26 (NASB)

15 "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16 "Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country. 17 "Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. 18 "Cursed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. 19 "Cursed *shall you be* when you come in, and cursed *shall you be* when you go out. 20 "The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. 21 "The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from the land where you are entering to possess it. 22 "The LORD will smite you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. 23 "The heaven which is over your head

shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. 24
"The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust;
from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.
25 "The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your
enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee
seven ways before them, and you will be *an example of terror*
to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26 "Your carcasses will be
food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and
there will be no one to frighten *them* away.

And, when His disciples, the 12 apostles, queried Him about the
beautiful temple:

Matthew 24:1-2 (NASB)

1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when
His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.
2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly
I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which
will not be torn down."

And, the Old Covenant ceremonies ended at the death of the
Messiah:

Mark 15:37-38 (NASB)

37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. **38**
And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

With the veil being ripped away from the Holy of Holies, the Old
Covenant came to an end.

And the prophet said that a new covenant would replace the
Mosaic covenant:

Jeremiah 31:31-32 (NASB)

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I
will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the
house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant which I made with
their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them
out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke,
although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

And the Apostle Paul reminds us in

Hebrews 13:20 (NASB)

20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord,

of the two key Christological events of the new covenant: the cross (“**the blood of the eternal covenant**”) and the resurrection (“**brought up from the dead**”).

The **eternal covenant** is opposed to the temporary covenant with Israel, which they broke, and the removal of which made room for the better covenant, which can never grow old, having been in the mind of the Godhead from eternity, and shall abide for ever.

Now that we have a New Covenant, does the nation of Israel still have a place in God’s plan, or has the church replaced Israel as “God’s people?”

Is Bible prophecy being fulfilled by modern-day Israel?

Does God have different plans for the Jews and the Gentiles?

Is the Gospel the salvation for everyone who believes, both Jew and Gentile?

Has the door of salvation been permanently closed to Jews?

What is the olive tree into which Gentiles will be grafted?

These questions can be answered by looking at what Paul says about **GOD’S TREE** in ...

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dead? 16 If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.* 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Around 4,000 years ago, God planted a tree that is still growing today.

That tree actually started with ONE MAN, whose physical descendants became the root system and a gigantic trunk that sprouted twelve huge branches and millions and millions of smaller branches.

These smaller branches were individual Jewish believers.

After about 2,000 years this tree underwent a radical mutation, not by natural causes but by divine design and divine intervention. What changed was the population of smaller branches. The Gentiles were grafted-in. It is now in effect a hybrid. Its native branches have been radically pruned, and for the last 2,000 years millions of compatible branches from wild-growing trees have been grafted onto that original tree, which is still going strong.

The one man, of course, was Abraham. The root-and-trunk system was the nation of Israel, and the original branches were individual Israelites. The mutation was sparked by the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus. The branches that were broken off were the Israelites who rejected Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The wild branches grafted in were and are Gentiles who turn to Jesus for their salvation. This gigantic tree, now composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, is called **the CHURCH**.

Let's think about this gigantic TREE. Please look at your sermon notes, and Romans 11. First, the ROOT of this tree (vv. 16-18) is OT (physical) Israel, the Jewish nation between Abraham and Christ. Through nearly 2,000 years of OT history, God nurtured and tended this tree. But why? Remember: a tree's root is not an end in itself, but is a MEANS to an end. The root serves a particular purpose.

So, we raise the question, what was Israel's purpose?

I. The Jews Task was Preparing For The Messiah

In the case of Israel, what was God's one purpose for its existence?
God Gave Israel The task of Preparing For The Messiah.

That one purpose was to prepare for the first coming of Jesus the Messiah.

The reason for Israel's election and existence as a special nation may be summed up in this one word:

PREPARATION, i.e., preparation for Christ's first coming.

Remember the beautiful lyrics of God Spell:

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord?

Acts 13:32-33 (NASB)

32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

Once Christ had come, there was therefore no more reason for Israel to exist in a special role in God's plan.

Thus God brought to an end Israel's special role.

This "setting aside" of Israel was equivalent to an "honorable discharge" from military service, or to the retiring after years of service with your employer.

It was marked dramatically by the tearing of the temple veil at the time of Christ's death.

Before eternity the God Head planed that the first coming of Jesus changed its whole character of God's Tree.

Jesus' coming did not do away with the tree, but transformed it.

How so?

First of all, now that Christ has come, God has done away with the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, as was his plan from the beginning.

This the BIG IDEA to remember.
Remember God's promise to Abraham?

Genesis 12:3 (NASB)

3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

That Promise has been fulfilled:

Galatians 3:28-29 (NASB)

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

The key to being God's special people now is faith in Jesus Christ. Whoever puts faith in Jesus as the Messiah is a part of God's tree, whether they be Jew or Gentile.

Paul explains in **Romans 11:17-21** how this transforms the tree.

Here the broken-off branches are individual Jews, and the "wild" branches are individual Gentiles.

Did not our Lord say:

John 15:5-6 (NASB)

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

The first stage of the transformation of the tree is the breaking off of some of the natural branches, specifically, all Jews who rejected Jesus.

II. The Transformation of the Tree

The second stage is the grafting in of wild branches, that is, those Gentiles who accept Jesus through faith.

Jesus Christ, and faith in Jesus Christ, have transformed the tree, which started out as the Jewish nation, into the CHURCH.

And in the CHURCH there is no distinction between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

The present form of god's tree thus is the CHURCH.

In a real sense the Church (believing Jews plus believing Gentiles in one body) is God's NEW Israel.

Old, physical, national, Israel is just the root of this tree.

And as the root of the tree is still a glorious one.

The church is a NEW Israel, formed on the spiritual basis of faith in Jesus and a new spiritual birth.

Romans 9:6 (NASB)

6 But *it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;*

Many OT prophecies about ISRAEL have been and are being fulfilled in the new Israel:

The new Jerusalem

Galatians 4:26 (NASB)

26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

The new temple

This spiritual house of God is described by the Apostle Peter...

1 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

What about ethnic Jews today?

Modern-day physical Israel—individually, collectively, and/or geographically—is NOT God's tree today.

Individual Jews who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are part of the transformed tree, the Church.

Unbelieving ethnic Jews are in no sense a special people of God; they are part of the broken-off branches Paul describes in Romans 11.

Does God have a place and a purpose, then, for physical Israel today, or in the future?

I answer both NO and YES.

NO, not as a nation, not as a separate “tree.”

Israel’s role in God’s plan was completed when Christ first came into the world.

God’s covenant with Israel was thus fulfilled.

YES, as individual branches.

God desires all Jews to “rejoin” their original tree, to be “grafted in again”

How does this happen?

By their not continuing in their unbelief in Jesus, by their acceptance of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Please look at Romans 11:26.

You have it both in the NASB and in the TEV, and the TEV is more accurate a translation.

The key word is **houtōs** in v. 26: “**thus, so, in this way.**”

Romans 11:26 (TEV)

26 And this is how all Israel will be saved. As the scripture says, "The Savior will come from Zion and remove all wickedness from the descendants of Jacob.

Here it should not be translated “so,” as if this is now just a general conclusion.

The meaning here is THIS is the WAY all true Israelites will be saved: by becoming a part of God's One Tree, the Church. There is no other way.

God does have a special interest in the Jews because of their unique role in OT times!

But he has no special role for them now.

He wants them to be saved, to believe in Christ, to be back in their own transformed tree, which is now the church.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

There is just ONE HOPE.

Ephesians 4:4 (TEV)

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you.

That one hope, whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, is to be a part of the ONE TREE, the CHURCH.

III. The Church's Task Is Proclaiming the Messiah

The task of the Jewish nation is summed up in the word preparation.

But the task of the Church is summed up in the word *proclamation*.

That is, the church exists to proclaim that the Messiah has already come.

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NASB)

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE

OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Our task is to invite the world to participate in all the blessings of salvation He has provided.

This change in covenant administration was announced even in OT times

Jeremiah 31:31 (NASB)

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

The discontinuity between Israel and the church was natural and expected

Hebrews 8:13 (NASB)

13 When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Remember the purpose of the nation of Israel was to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, and the purpose of the church was to proclaim the Messiah.

Whereas OT Israel was basically a physical entity, the church or the new Israel is a spiritual entity.

Though God's dealings with OT Israel certainly involved spiritual blessings and spiritual purposes, the people with whom the covenant was made was a physical nation; and God's interactions with them were mainly on the level of the physical.

I know you remember the fact that membership in the covenant people was a matter of physical birth and lineage, regardless of one's spiritual character.

Also, the Old Covenant bestowed many material blessings upon the nation of Israel, including the geographical land of Canaan.

Worship was centralized in a material temple located in the earthly city of Jerusalem.

The enemies whom God used against Israel or from whom he delivered them were physical nations such as the Philistines and the Babylonians.

The New Israel, on the other hand, is a spiritually defined people with whom God deals on a spiritual level.

One enters it not by physical birth but by spiritual rebirth.

John 3:3 (NASB)

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Worship is not limited to nor dependent upon any specific physical location

John 4:21 (NASB)

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

The church is a spiritual temple, and its sacrifices are spiritual

1 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As Paul sums this up,

Philippians 3:3 (NASB)

3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

The bottom line is that OT Israel and the NT church are not one continuous people of God.

The church is the new Israel, but it is different in many ways from the Israelite nation of old.

The new Israel is under a new covenant

The new Israelis entered a new way (spiritually, not physically)

The new Israel worships in new ways

The new Israel has a new understanding of God as being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The new Israel has a new hope (Christ's *second* coming, not his first).

And, the new Israel has a clear beginning point: the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, when a new Jerusalem and a new Zion were born in the midst of the old.

Prayer and Invitation

May 28 Lesson 13 Pervasive Love

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:8-13

Background Scripture: Jonah 4

JONAH 4

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. **2** He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **3** Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” **4** But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?” **5** Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6** Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. **7** But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8** When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” **9** But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.” **10** But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

KEY VERSE

Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?—Jonah 4:11

Introduction

A. The Fighting Deacon

He said that in his younger days he was known as “the fighting deacon.” This reputation was acquired by the fact that on two occasions in meetings of the church board he had “slugged” (his word) someone who disagreed with him. He no longer had such a violent temper, but he was almost proud of what he had done.

But anger can be a very toxic emotion. Mark Twain wrote that “anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” Some have rationalized their outbursts of anger by saying that they lose their tempers quickly and then calm down almost immediately. Billy Sunday, a famous preacher of the past, once encountered a lady who said, “I blow up, and then it’s all over.” Sunday replied, “So does a shotgun, and look at the damage it leaves behind.”

The Bible has much to say about anger (Proverbs 29:22; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19, 20; etc.). The words *anger* or *angry* occur several times in Jonah 4, the text for our lesson. Jonah had a problem with anger. As the Lord worked through him to bring the people of Nineveh to repentance, God also worked with Jonah to help him overcome this problem. Anger is not sinful in and of itself (note Jesus’ anger in Mark 3:5). But irrational anger needs corrective action, and that’s what God provides Jonah in today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Background

Since the background material noted in the three previous lessons applies here as well, that information need not be repeated. Much of that material is very weighty, so we shall close this series with some “lighter side” distinctive facts that help to make the book of Jonah memorable.

1. Jonah is the only prophet recorded to have traveled on the Mediterranean Sea.
2. Jonah is the only prophet recorded to have outright refused to undertake a mission from God. Other prophets revealed doubt from time to time (example: 1 Kings 19:3, 14), but Jonah stands alone in his flagrant rebellion.

3. When Nicodemus attempted to defend Jesus during a discussion, he was rebuked with the observation that “a prophet does not come out of Galilee” (John 7:52). This overlooked the fact that Jonah was from Gath Hopher (2 Kings 14:25), which was less than three miles northwest of Nazareth.

4. The book of Jonah, being primarily a narrative about the man, records just one predictive prophecy—a prophecy of only five words in Hebrew (Jonah 3:4, last week’s lesson).

5. The book of Jonah is the only prophetic book with miracles by God that involved the prophet personally—from the storm and the fish to the worm and the wind.

The traditional view of authorship for the book of Jonah is that Jonah himself wrote it. As he came to the end of it, he must have been greatly embarrassed about the prejudice and anger he had displayed so blatantly. Our lesson begins just after the point where God saw the repentance of the Ninevites and decided not to destroy the city (Jonah 3:10, last week’s lesson).

I. Jonah’s Pettiness

(Jonah 4:1-4)

A. Reaction and Reminder (vv. 1, 2)

1. But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. The compassionate decision of God in Jonah 3:10 is not what the prophet wants to hear! He is angry that his preaching results in the city’s being spared God’s destructive wrath. This is not the way a preacher would normally react when his message brings repentance by the thousands! The Lesson Background of lesson 11 explains the possible basis of Jonah’s anger.

As a bit of speculation, Jonah may wonder whether God will treat the people of his own nation (the northern kingdom of Israel) likewise, should they repent when under threat of similar judgment. Historically, however, the people of Israel do not repent, in spite of the preaching of prophets (see 2 Kings 17:13, 14, 23). The sparing of Nineveh will not be repeated for Samaria a few decades later. But neither will it be repeated for Nineveh itself, as the prophet Nahum and historical records make clear.

We may also wonder exactly when Jonah is informed of God's decision to spare Nineveh. Is it before the 40-day period of Jonah 3:4 is up, thereby implying that Jonah is angry and indignant for the remainder of that period? Or do it and the other events of Jonah 4 happen at the end of the 40-day period? Scholars disagree, but the last phrase of Jonah 4:5 may indicate that the 40 days are not yet completed.

2. He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Jonah turns his anger into prayer, but his motivation is not to become compliant with what God has done. Instead, he seems to be trying to make God feel guilty for sending him on the mission trip to Nineveh.

How to Say It

Assyria Uh-sear-ee-uh.

Assyrian Uh-sear-e-un.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Gath Hopher Gath Hee-fer.

Jonah Jo-nuh.

Mediterranean Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.

Nazareth Naz-uh-reth.

Nicodemus Nick-uh-dee-mus.

Nineveh Nin-uh-vuh.

Ninevites Nin-uh-vites.

Tarshish Tar-shish.

Jonah's prayer includes an eloquent description of the great attributes of God. In that regard, the prayer mirrors Exodus 34:6 as Jonah affirms that God is *gracious and compassionate ... slow to anger and abounding in love*. These were Jonah's conclusions before *fleeing to Tarshish* (Jonah 1:3). Able to list God's outstanding characteristics, Jonah wants to be the one to decide to whom they will and will not apply. He had wanted to be saved when he was in the fish (Jonah 2:2), but he does not want the

Ninevites to be saved from the doom prophesied for them. He wants God to do things Jonah's way, not God's way. A certain parallel can be seen in churches where people enjoy Christianity's benefits but are unwilling to support missionaries adequately. The sad result is to deny people in other lands and cultures the blessing of everlasting life through Jesus. After realizing how much the Lord has forgiven us, we should want others to know that there is a God who is willing to forgive them as well.

What Do You Think?

How can we avoid feeling resentful when God extends his mercy to others?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When extended to backslidden Christians

When extended to those who have heard and rejected the gospel

When extended to those who have never heard the gospel

B. Request and Question (vv. 3, 4)

3. "Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah's frustration with the flow of events overwhelms him—so much so that he expresses his preference for death over life. This contrasts with his attitude when he was inside the fish, for there he wanted to live and see God's temple again (Jonah 2:2, 4, lesson 11).

Jonah has been spared from death himself, but now he is despondent and disappointed that the people of Nineveh have been spared from prophesied destruction. His inconsistent reasoning serves as a marvelous set-up for the memorable lesson God is about to teach him.

4. But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

As with Job, *the Lord* responds with a question (compare Job 38:2). The fact that God's interrogation begins with the issue of anger implies that an adjustment is necessary in that regard, as

Jonah is led to look at himself in a mirror. There are indeed legitimate reasons for being angry. Do any of these form the basis for Jonah's own anger?

We note that the Lord does not ask his question because he needs information—the Lord already knows everything. The question is designed to get Jonah to think. The fact that we see no response from him may indicate that he is compelled to do just that. On the other hand, a lack of response may indicate that Jonah is so aggravated that he cannot process the question.

What Do You Think?

What are some steps to take for moving from anger to mercy?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering how God himself does so

Considering how God has treated us

Considering our motives

Other

II. Jonah's Protection

(Jonah 4:5-8)

A. Hut and Plant (vv. 5, 6)

5. Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city.

There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

The previous verses reveal the emotional responses of Jonah. In this verse, physical actions take the spotlight.

If circumstances work against a person's desires in some way, he or she may not take it well! Physically, these reactions may cover the spectrum from becoming very active (from fear, as in 1 Kings 19:3; from anger, as in Acts 7:57, 58; etc.) to becoming completely inactive (1 Kings 19:4, 5; 21:4). Jonah ends up in the latter as he seems to adopt an attitude of denial. Surely God did not mean it when he said he wouldn't destroy Nineveh, did he? So Jonah takes the actions described here, a disposition we might call "watchful waiting."

Jonah's initial approach toward Nineveh would have been from the west. After crossing the Tigris River, he entered Nineveh to preach

as he continued in an easterly direction. Today, some of the gates of ancient Nineveh have been restored in order to reflect the glory of the city's past. Archaeology and terrain suggest that Jonah likely makes his exit through a gate at the southeastern part of a wall after he finishes his preaching tour *at a place east of the city*.

After he is out of the city, he probably finds a mound or high point that gives him a better view. There he builds a crude hut for shade where he can wait to see what will happen to the city. His food and water sources are not given. This waiting reflects disbelief of the Lord's decision.

This sequence may confirm that the 40-day period (Jonah 3:4) is not over, for Jonah does not want to be in the city when time is up—just in case. Most people who want to pout seem to prefer solitude.

READY AND ACTING

Benjamin Disraeli served Britain as prime minister from 1874-1880. He experienced many setbacks and once said, "I am prepared for the worst, but hope for the best." The saying has been adapted to read "I am expecting the worst, but hoping for the best." There seems to be no adaptation, however, for the saying to be "I am ready for the worst, but acting to bring about the best."

What Jonah saw as the worst case—the repentance of the Ninevites—was actually the best case from God's point of view. One would think that Jonah would have felt successful when his preaching brought about repentance. But his sinful attitudes blinded him to God's desired end.

What is our own outlook regarding what we consider to be a worst-case scenario to be ready for and a best-case scenario to act to bring about? Jesus' resurrection proved that God can take the worst the powers of this world can dish out and turn it into the best outcome possible. And Jesus described his forthcoming resurrection in terms of—of all things!—Jonah's time inside the fish (Matthew 12:38-41).—C. R. B.

6. Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

Five events or special objects are mentioned in the book of Jonah as being prepared by God: a wind (Jonah 1:4), a fish (1:17), a leafy plant (4:6), a worm (4:7), and an east wind (4:8). We are now at the third of these five as *the Lord God* temporarily supplements Jonah's protection from the sun by means of a rapidly growing plant. One possibility is that this is a castor-oil plant. It grows rapidly to a height of about eight feet, and it has very large leaves (see also v. 10, below).

What Do You Think?

What can we do to improve our helping skills in preparing to be God's instrument of comfort to others?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

For counseling adults

For counseling teenagers

▪ For counseling preteens

The double layer of shade for Jonah is better. He is *very happy about* this additional blessing, which appears so suddenly and adds to his comfort. Jonah is certainly concerned for himself! But love for perceived enemies is still lacking. The teaching about loving your enemies is given by Jesus in Matthew 5:44; but Jonah has no excuse, even though he lives over 700 years before Jesus. By Jonah's day, the enemy-love principle has already been stated in Exodus 23:4, 5 and Proverbs 25:21.

B. Worm and Wind (vv. 7, 8)

7. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.

"Jonah and the Worm" is the title of one preacher's sermon on Jonah. This title is intended to pique curiosity, since sermons on Jonah are usually about "Jonah and the Whale." The latter is based on Matthew 12:40, which refers to "the whale's belly" in the *King James Version*.

God used a great sea creature to correct Jonah's attitude about a trip to Nineveh. Now he uses a small worm to teach his prophet a further lesson. First, the worm does what God programmed it to do: it begins eating the stalk of *the plant*. The interpretation of

“leafy plant” to refer to a castor-oil plant fits well, since this plant withers very quickly if the main stalk is injured.

8. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

With the plant now useless for shade, God increases Jonah’s discomfort further by means of *a scorching east wind* (compare Jeremiah 18:17). As the sun rises, all this works together to cause Jonah to become light-headed and dizzy. He temporarily forgets his anger, but remains self-centered as he expresses his wish *to die*. He is physically and spiritually miserable while far from home, in the foreign land of an enemy. Exhaustion from a preaching tour he had not desired is now multiplied by the possibility of heat stroke. God has to this point used a storm and a great fish to encourage Jonah to go to Nineveh. Now God uses a worm and an east wind to move Jonah to where he should be in his attitudes toward those who are different.

What Do You Think?

What can we do to prepare for times that will be difficult to endure?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding emotional preparations

Regarding spiritual preparations

Regarding physical preparations

Other

III. God’s Pronouncements

(Jonah 4:9-11)

A. Question and Response (v. 9)

9a But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

God is not finished with his efforts to correct Jonah’s thinking. Jonah is being challenged to think correctly about the mind-set a true prophet should have. The first eight words of God’s question here are identical to the eight words of his initial question in Jonah

4:4. The added words *about the plant* here indicate God is probing deeper as he requires Jonah to think about something specific, something that is not associated with the city of Nineveh.

9b “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

Jonah’s answer is petty, defensive, and almost defiant. He attempts to bolster his position by asserting once again his preference for death.

Jonah’s peevishness indicates confidence that he has done nothing wrong. Further, he cannot comprehend why he has to suffer the loss of the plant. Emotional people who learn to control their emotions can do well in telling others about the love of God. Jonah has not yet reached that point; he lacks any compassion for the Ninevites.

FLYING OFF THE HANDLE

In America’s pioneer days, axheads were made in the industrialized East, then shipped to the frontier West for fitting with handles. The handles were often fashioned by unskilled handymen, yielding the deadly possibility that an axhead could fly off an ill-fitting handle when in use (compare Deuteronomy 19:5).

The suddenness of such an event became a metaphor for an outburst of anger: *flying off the handle*. Possibly the first such use of this figure of speech in print was in a satirical story by Thomas Haliburton in 1844. Haliburton was a Canadian who mocked human nature in general and AmericanCanadian relations in particular in essays in *The Nova Scotian*.

But the idea goes back much further than the year AD 1844! God’s directive for Jonah to preach in Nineveh seemed to strike a deep vein of resentment in that prophet; thus we see him “flying off the handle” at God. Do you deal with your anger any better than did Jonah? See James 1:19, 20.—C. R. B.

B. Rebuke and Reason (vv. 10, 11)

10. But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

God's second question (v. 9a) is designed to soften Jonah's attitude. But Job's response (v. 9b) indicates further work is needed. God's observations of fact challenge Jonah's thinking by reminding the prophet that he had no ownership of the plant, for he had neither planted nor tended it. These facts should compel the prophet to realize how absurd and small his defensive statements really are. But God has a bit more yet to say.

11. “And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

The Lord's final question demands that Jonah contrast his thoughts about the plant with God's thoughts regarding Nineveh. Jonah should feel embarrassed, for it is obvious that the population of a large city is more important than a single, solitary plant! Jonah's self-centeredness is now so obvious that even he should see it.

The size and greatness of Nineveh is indicated by the number 120,000. There are two main lines of interpretation regarding this number. Some propose that it is the total population of the city. A city of this acreage (see commentary on Jonah 3:3 in lesson 12) can accommodate twice that number easily. Under this view, the declaration regarding the city's residents who *cannot tell their right hand from their left* has a spiritual dimension—that spiritually the Ninevites are somehow deficient in being able to distinguish good from evil. This viewpoint runs into trouble at Romans 1:20. The other view is that the 120,000 refers to the number of children in Nineveh who are not yet old enough to tell right from left. That would boost the total population significantly when estimates of the number of older children and adults are added in. The grand total may be too much according to our analysis of Jonah 3:3 in lesson 12, unless the villages in the immediate vicinity are included.

The reference to *many animals* is a reminder that God is concerned for animals as well as people. The word translated *animals* refers to livestock in general (Exodus 13:15; 22:19; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What Christian ministries can your church offer to those of the nearest “great city”?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering demographic factors

In terms of priorities

In terms of defining *ministry*

Other

Conclusion

A. Running Ahead of God

In general, there are two mistakes we can make in our relationship with God. First, we can lag behind him, failing to move as fast as he wants us to (example: Haggai 1:1-8). The other mistake is to run ahead of him. This may involve making plans that are not his (example: 2 Samuel 7:1-13) or anticipating what we think he “must” do, as in today’s lesson.

It is so easy to run ahead of God and presume that he must do such and such! That presumption resulted in anger and pouting on Jonah’s part, and it can do the same to us.

Don’t run ahead of God!

B. Prayer

O God, may your Word ever remind us of your love for humanity! Enable us to do all we can to take the gospel to all, without bias or prejudice. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

When God loves, he loves the world!

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